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SUBJECT: LITHUANIA REMAINS COMMITTED TO SUCCESS IN
AFGHANISTAN

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) As the Fourth Lithuanian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) left for Kabul November 14, Lithuania continues to demonstrate its commitment to success in Afghanistan. Lithuania is set to take on the entire military operating expense of its PRT in Ghor Province starting January 2007; is considering a fourfold expansion of its civilian assistance programs; and may deploy its Special Forces to Afghanistan in 2007. End Summary.

Lithuania set to pay for PRT

2. (SBU) Lithuania will take over funding of the Ghor Province PRT from the United States beginning January 2007. "Afghanistan is priority number one," Defense Undersecretary Renatas Norkus told Ambassador November 15. "You won't get another letter from our minister asking for the U.S. to extend funding to the PRT." As a result, Lithuania's 2007 budget for international operations is slated to reach nearly 90 million litas (about USD 33 million), accounting for ten percent of its total defense spending. Much of the increase will go to U.S. defense contractor Kellogg, Brown and Root, which the Lithuanians will fund at least until November 2007 to provide support to the PRT.

Civilian aid

3. (SBU) Law enforcement improvement remains Lithuania's priority for its civilian assistance projects in Afghanistan. A third of Lithuania's current civilian assistance goes to technical support and training of local police, Lithuania's Ambassador for Assistance to Afghanistan Ginte Damusis told us. Lithuania has so far supplied the Afghan National Police with nearly USD 130,000 in vehicles, radio sets, and forensics kits, as well as technical training. Lithuania has police advisors on the ground in Chaghcharan to give advice and assistance, and has solicited technical assistance from other allies as well, including the U.S. and Latvia. Just last week, a Lithuanian forensics expert held training sessions for police investigators in Chaghcharan and donated special forensics equipment for investigating explosions.

4. (SBU) Lithuania has recruited other nations to support the PRT projects as well. Croatia and Iceland are participating in the current deployment, and Iceland may send additional police advisors to PRT 5. Ukraine and Moldova are both considering future contributions, probably of medical personnel. (The USG currently has a POLOFF, USAID representative, and two police mentors working with the PRT.)

Counter-narcotics

15. (SBU) Lithuania's PRT has supported the Afghan National Police in the destruction of 2.6 tons of opium. While the PRT does not directly participate in counter-narcotics operations, they lent political support to and advised the local Afghan security services that confiscated the narcotics. ISAF leadership thanked the Lithuanian team for their role in urging the prompt and public destruction of the drugs and in creating a security environment where the Afghan police were able to maintain control over the drugs once confiscated.

Hearts and minds projects

16. (SBU) Lithuania has engaged in "hearts and minds" projects aiming to bring visible infrastructure development to Ghor's communities and to give technical assistance in ways that directly improve the health and welfare of Ghor's residents. Lithuania spent nearly USD 100,000 to finance micro-hydro power plants in remote villages, combined with nominal contributions from local communities. The PRT's program to train medical personnel, with a budget of around USD 13,000, sponsors training courses for local obstetricians working in remote villages in order to reduce the childbirth death rate.

The program also sponsors Afghan physicians to train in Lithuanian hospitals in cooperation with Kaunas Medical University. The GOL allocated 200,000 litas (USD 74,000) to a Food-For-Work program, implemented by the World Food Program, to mitigate the effects of drought in Ghor province.

The government has co-financed (with USAID) a

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community-based education project implemented by Catholic Relief Services.

17. (SBU) The Ministry of Defense also allocates money for goodwill projects. Lithuanian soldiers recently purchased carpet and over 1000 copies of the Koran for mosques in Ghor province. The MOD helped finance the reconstruction of a secondary school in Chaghcharan in 2005, and plans to open a Kindergarten on the premises in 2006.

18. (SBU) Lithuania has sought not only to expand its own assistance to the region, but to take an active role in attracting other development aid to Ghor. Lithuania has moved its Ambassador to the PRT to Kabul part-time in order to engage Afghan national officials as well as Kabul-based NGOs on projects for Ghor, leveraging the relatively stable security situation and what Lithuania is doing already.

Seeking more cash

19. (SBU) The MFA and MOD are seeking a five-fold increase, from one million litas to five (370,000 to 1.85 million USD), for Lithuania's civilian assistance programs to Afghanistan in 2007. The MFA's request ultimately will rely on the Seimas's approval, but Lithuania's Ambassador for Assistance to Afghanistan Damusis has actively engaged MPs and pursued a press strategy to garner support for the line-item increase. In a recent meeting with the Ambassador, PM Kirkilas predicted the government would be successful in obtaining this increase from the parliament.

Shoring up support in Lithuania - public diplomacy

110. (SBU) The Lithuanian MFA has pursued an active public relations strategy to increase support for Lithuania's missions in Afghanistan, both in government circles and among the public. The government collaborated last year in the production of a well-received documentary by a Lithuanian

television producer entitled "Sand Generals." The movie provided an unembellished picture of the challenges faced by Lithuanian troops in Ghor, but portrayed the PRT Mission in a very positive light. Ambassador Damusis gives numerous press interviews, appears frequently before parliament, and has pressed her case before university audiences and even at a rock concert. Press coverage of the PRT has been mostly positive, focusing on several interviews with Ambassador Damusis and outlining how Lithuania is helping the Afghan people. A pair of visits between Afghan and Lithuanian officials this summer garnered much press coverage and drew attention to the humanitarian work that Lithuania was doing. One recent article by a local professor questioned both Lithuania's decision to go to Afghanistan and its effectiveness there. It was rebutted by several articles that supported Lithuania's presence in Afghanistan as being in its national interest, and that countered the professor's facts. We continue to emphasize the importance of Lithuania's contribution in our public diplomacy efforts.

Comment

11. (SBU) The GOL continues to demonstrate its commitment to success in Afghanistan and perceives this as its most important international mission. The government, press, and public at large generally support the mission and see it in terms of Lithuania's national interest as a contributor to collective security under NATO. Unlike the situation in some allied nations, we do not see any serious signs of flagging support for the PRT mission. If anything, the upcoming Riga summit should strengthen Lithuanian enthusiasm.
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